Mrs. Talmadge, better known as "Peggy," and Constance, Norma and Natalie (her three daughters).

"Peggy Helped Us"

The Story of Three Successful Sisters

By CARL SCHURZ LOWDEN

SINCE the world began there have been two types of parents, those that domineer and those that lend a hand, those that boss and those that co-operate. If a child could have any say in the matter, it would choose parents that assist and supervise rather than those that employ the iron rule which breaks the budding spirit.

Constance Talmadge, Norma Talmadge and Natalie Talmadge, the famous trio of the films, owe much to their parents. Mr. Talmadge never had any hankering after the stage, but Mrs. Talmadge was long a member of a dramatic society in Brooklyn. When her daughters showed an inclination toward things theatrical, their mother did not object. Indeed, if you should ask any of the three about her start in pictures, she would soon utter the magic words, "Peggy helped us."

Of course you would immediately wonder, as I did, who Peggy is or was. However, I soon found out that Peggy is just a pet name for the woman that wisely guided each of her daughters and carefully refrained from squelching ambition or talent.

"The girls," Mrs. Talmadge confesses, "have never called me 'Mother,' but have always used my first name. I like it, too, for it makes me feel as if I were really a fourth sister."

When the daughters transformed the cellar of the house in Brooklyn into a tiny theater, Mrs. Talmadge did not object nor scold them. The amateurs soon discovered a couple of old trunks that contained dresses, and these became a Happy Hunting Ground for "props" and costumes. The mother aided the girls in fashioning such bits as Greek togas and Egyptian headpieces.

Their orchestra was a slam-bang affair of drums, bells, frying pans and wailing squawkers. Mrs. Talmadge did not complain at the noise, but the neighbors may have had inimical thoughts upon the subject. The mother forgave the tin band and painted some of the scenic paraphernalia. However, she did not relish the menagerie that her daughters installed as a sort of additional attraction.

"There was just one thing I drew the line at in those days," she asserts. "The animals were a nuisance. Every time I put my foot into the cellar I safeguarded myself with a candle. I needed it, too, for a pop-eyed hoptoad, or a squirming salamander, or a slimy turtle would suddenly dart out of some dark corner right under my feet and I could scarcely avoid stepping on it."

The sisters had a queer hobby of collecting angleworms. Natalie, the youngest, wanted to turn the cellar into a hospital for wounded dolls, but Norma and Constance would not consent. A compromise was effected with bowls of goldfish, some guinea pigs and a three-legged rabbit. When the girls tired of tableaux of historical scenes and the drama, they put on a fair imitation of a circus with a Talmadge in charge of each ring.

Constance was the envy of her sisters because she could do trapeze stunts and hang from the bar with her toes. Norma was the bookish one and liked to make herself the leading lady of the tragedies they staged. Natalie was the domestic and more practical member of the family.

Occasionally the girls quarrelled. Sometimes Constance would evince an ambition to be the leading lady herself and Norma would strenuously protest against any infringement upon her own exclusive rights. Peggy, of course, would settle the matter and bring about a declaration of peace in the Talmadge home.

The girls' mother did not "have a fit" when Norma, the oldest of her daughters, said she would like to go into pictures. She readily assented and then accompanied Norma to the Vitagraph studio where she obtained a small part which proved to be the beginning of a long line of movie successes.

Norma prospered and rose from "bits" to "leads." Mrs. Talmadge encouraged her to study French and went with the girl to all her singing lessons. She knew that she could advise and assist and be the steadying influence that every girl needs. Indeed, if Peggy had not helped her daughters, would somebody else have taken the job and bungled the whole business?

Three years ago Constance avowed her desire to "flicker on the silver sheet." Mrs. Talmadge was glad rather than sad; so, just as she had allowed Norma to follow her own inclinations, she laughingly consented with the observation that two stars twinkling in her own family were better than one.

"When Norma went to the Coast," says Constance, "I went too. Peggy didn't like to let her go alone, nor to leave Natalie and me here. It was like the puzzle of the man crossing the river and taking over, one at a time, the fox, the goose and the basket of corn. Which two could he leave behind? So we all went along."

That was a pretty good solution of the perplexing situation. Everybody went along and everybody was satisfied. With the girls in California and herself in Brooklyn, Mrs. Talmadge would have worried a bit and sorried a bit at the separation.

Natalie, the youngest of the trio, announced that she would never try to be a star or even enter the movies. She studied stenography, typewriting and bookkeeping, but she did not succeed in getting away from the movie atmosphere, for she became private secretary to Roscoe (Fatty) Arbuckle. Despite her former prejudice, she recently made her screen debut with Norma in "The Isle of Conquest" and will soon appear with Constance in "The Love Expert." Maybe she was playing make-believe when she declared her enmity to the strip of celluloid.

Stories of Old Home Songs

The Old Oaken Bucket

JAZZ IS going out slowly but surely; and the old songs, those that are ever good to hear, are coming back slowly but surely. Within a few years "The Old Oaken Bucket" and other jazz-eclipsed favorites will shine again as in bygone days.

The open well with its windlass and wooden, mossy bucket was never sanitary. It would never take the prize in a health show. Investigators found millions of microbes comfortably situated on the same worn rim from which many thirsty sojourners drank and other millions living happily in close proximity to or in the water; so they condemned it.

Then somebody got out a cruel parody on the poem itself. It pictured how the flies loved the well and clearly described the fly menace. These sanitation or clean-up drives with the campaigns against flies doomed the windlass and all that went with it. The memory is all that remains.

In modern days and modern ways the things that were good enough for our grandfathers do not find a place; but our grandfathers and grandmothers could, if they would, tell how only the old well saw and heard the man's proposal or the first kiss so quickly stolen and perhaps reproved with a slap from a white hand. For them the old well embodies many of their fondest recollections; it had a glow and glamour of romance that it never could have for us.

The author of the song was a printer named Samuel Woodworth who was born and reared at the quaint old town of Scituate, near Boston. At his home a "moss-covered bucket" hung in the well. Frequently neighbor boys came to play with him; when they became tired they would rest at the well and quench their thirst.

Samuel's father was a poet who had been a soldier in the Revolution. His poverty prevented him from educating his children. However, Samuel scribbled some verse which attracted the attention of Reverend Nehemiah Thomas who then thought well enough of the boy to teach him the classics.

At seventeen the boy was apprenticed to the publisher of a newspaper. A few years later he established his own paper but his venture failed at the end of the second month. He issued a weekly, then a monthly, and wrote a history of the war of 1812. He published The New York Mirror for a time and penned several operettas of which "Forest Rose" was the most successful. Most of his work carried the stamp of mediocrity; only "The Old Oaken Bucket" has survived the test of the passing years.

The printer-poet would have achieved much more than he did if he had not possessed the restlessness or wanderlust which then characterized many of his kind. He would not stick to any job and, furthermore, his liking for liquor unquestionably handicapped him.

On a certain day in 1817 when Samuel Woodworth was in New York he left his work and went into a place where previous experience told him he could get red wine of the sort that pleased his palate. He drank the glass of wine, set the empty container down, turned to some friends, and warmly declared:

"That is the finest drink of any kind that I ever tasted in this city or elsewhere."

As Woodworth turned to go out a man stepped forward and tugged at the printer's coat. He was one of those boys that had played around the old well at Scituate, but Woodworth evidently did not recognize him.

"You are, I think, mistaken in regard to that," he said. "There certainly was one thing that far surpassed this wine in the way of a drink, as you too will admit."

But Samuel's brain was a bit befogged. He remembered nothing that was finer than the drink he had just taken; so he asked to be enlightened.

"Sam," the other replied, "don't you recollect when we were boys and drank that pure, sparkling water that we used to get in the old oaken bucket that hung in the well? There never was any drink finer than that."

The printer-poet agreed. He said no more, stood around awhile, and then hurried away. At the office where he was employed he immediately recorded the three stanzas which had formed in his mind. Later they were set to music and published as a song.

Other lyrics of Woodworth's have been forgotten. "The Old Oaken Bucket" is green in our memory because he had lived it. The few words spoken in that saloon had taken him back to his boyhood and given him the impulse or inspiration.

George Perkins Marsh, a critic, wrote a book, "Lectures on the English Language," in which he compared "oak" and "oaken" and other word-forms. Of the printer's production he said:

"Woodworth's fine song, 'The Old Oaken Bucket,' which has embalmed in undying verse so many of the most touching recollections of rural childhood, will preserve the more poetic form, 'oaken,' together with the memory of the almost obsolete implement it celebrates, through all dialect changes as long as English shall be a spoken tongue."

This comment was written long ago. Today the old well and its oaken bucket has ceased to exist except as a curio or bit of rustic setting that appeals to the fancy or imagination of some men and some women.

The Old Oaken Bucket

How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood,
When fond recollection presents them to view!
The orchard, the meadow, the deep tangled wildwood,
And every loved spot which my infancy knew,
The wide-spreading pond and the mill that stood by it,
The bridge and the rock where the cataract fell;
The cot of my father, the dairy house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket that hung in the well.

That moss-covered bucket I hailed as a treasure,
For often at noon, when returned from the field
I found it the source of an exquisite pleasure,
The purest and sweetest that nature can yield.
How ardent I seized it, with hands that were glowing,
And quick to the white-pebbled bottom it fell.
Then soon with the emblem of truth overflowing,
And dripping with coolness, it rose from the well.

How sweet from the green mossy brim to receive it,
As, poised on the curb, it inclined to my lips!
Not a full blushing goblet could tempt me to leave it,
Though filled with the nectar that Jupiter sips.
And now, far removed from the loved habitation,
The tear of regret will intrusively swell,
As fancy reverts to my father's plantation,
And sighs for the bucket that hung in the well.